

# In California, Facts and Science Still Matter

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**Highlight:** Jerry Brown's California is moving toward carbon-free electricity as President Trump's Washington beds down with the fossil fuel lobby. We stand with California.

## Body

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People who worry about climate change have been in a state of high anxiety about President Trump's ignorance about the issue, his assault on Obama-era policies designed to do something about it and the growing evidence that extreme weather events and other consequences of global warming, long predicted by mainstream scientists, are now upon us.

Along comes California — yet again — to make people feel better about the possibility of serious action. The state is taking new steps to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions and, in so doing, it is reaffirming its willingness to lead on a matter of global and national concern when Mr. Trump will not.

On Tuesday, the State Legislature approved a bill mandating that by 2045 all of the state's electricity come from renewable and zero carbon sources like wind, solar, hydropower and nuclear. The original goal was 50 percent renewables by 2030; this bill kicks the target up to 60 percent by 2030 en route to zero carbon by 2045.

The move is part of California's broader effort to cut economywide emissions from all sources by 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2030, and stands in luminous contrast to Mr. Trump's recent power plant proposal that would do essentially nothing to reduce emissions beyond what market forces are likely to achieve. Unlike President Barack Obama's Clean Power Plan, the Trump proposal sets no performance standards, or targets, and would allow states to decide how — or even whether — to regulate climate-altering emissions from coal-burning power plants. Making his political intentions crystal clear, Mr. Trump traveled to West Virginia to highlight the plan and extol the virtues of "beautiful, clean coal."

California's action came in advance of what can be seen as another thumb in Mr. Trump's eye, the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, Sept. 12 to 14, co-hosted by California's governor, Jerry Brown, and the former New York mayor and current climate activist Michael Bloomberg. There will be three days of speeches and seminars on the roles that technology, municipalities, states and businesses can play in the fight against climate change, plus appearances by climate combat veterans like Al Gore and John Kerry. The event as a whole will provide a kind of group therapy session — as well as a reunion of sorts — for officials and activists deeply angered by Mr. Trump's refusal to hold up America's end of the bargain struck at the climate change summit in Paris in December 2015. The Obama administration promised major cuts in America's emissions, which alone account for about one-fifth of the world's total, second only to the carbon pollution coming from China.

Mr. Trump startled the world on June 1 of last year by announcing his decision to withdraw from that agreement, but within days of his announcement an astonishing assemblage of more than 1,200 governors, mayors and businesses promised in a letter titled "We Are Still In" that they would do everything they could to honor Mr. Obama's promises. The letter argued that global warming imposes real and rising costs, and that the clean energy

economy to which the Paris agreement aspired offered enormous opportunities for American industry and workers. The same crowd, and these same themes, will be much in evidence in San Francisco next week.

California, obviously, is not alone in this fight. Massachusetts and other states are gearing up for a fierce legal response to Mr. Trump's dirty power plan. But California is different in several respects, including its sheer size, its long record of leading the nation on environmental protection and, not least, its robust bipartisan history of tackling climate change. It was Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican, who in 2006 signed a landmark bill, known as AB 32, aimed at reducing economywide emissions from multiple sources of carbon dioxide. At the time, the administration of President George W. Bush was doing next to nothing about the problem.

The California law affected businesses and consumers across the board, requiring cleaner cars, energy-efficient buildings and alternative fuels. It was the same Governor Schwarzenegger who, four years later, beat back a coalition of oil companies and big money men, including Charles and David Koch, who tried to neuter that law with a ballot initiative. He also endorsed the most recent renewable-energy bill in a letter to legislators.

California may feel, too, a special sense of urgency, not to mention a special sense of grievance. In early August, in another big swipe at Mr. Obama's climate agenda, the Trump administration announced a rollback of part of the former president's ambitious fuel efficiency standards for automobiles. The Trump plan would not only weaken the rules but also strip California of its historic right, conferred by federal clean air laws, to set its own air quality standards. Those standards — which 13 other states have chosen to follow — led during the Obama years to a set of nationwide fuel economy benchmarks that, until Mr. Trump intervened, promised consumers years of steadily cleaner and more efficient cars. California, not surprisingly, has vowed to fight.

As if finding itself in Mr. Trump's cross hairs were not enough, California has reason right now to feel especially vulnerable to climate change itself. This year's brutal wildfires have set records for scope and financial destruction, and on Aug. 27 a new statewide assessment from the California Natural Resources Agency, based on dozens of peer-reviewed studies, promised more of the same in the decades to come. And not just more wildfires, but also rising oceans that could erode between a third and two-thirds of Southern California's shoreline, many more heat-related fatalities, billions of dollars in damages and a diminished snowpack. All will bear the fingerprints of climate change.

"In California, facts and science still matter," Governor Brown said in commenting on the report. "These findings are profoundly serious and will continue to guide us as we confront the apocalyptic threat of irreversible climate change."

The reference to facts and science was a nice little needle aimed at the White House. Where, on this issue, they don't seem to matter at all.

PHOTO: (PHOTOGRAPH BY Alex Merto FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

## Classification

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